

**A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL STRATEGIES:  
A RESTROSPECTIVE FROM 7 ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATED IN  
CONNECTICUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**by**

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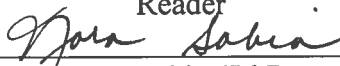
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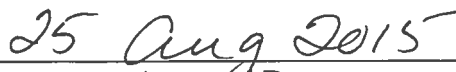
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# **ABSTRACT**

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**Rosanne Guccione Fullam**

The educational community has developed many programs, support systems, and provided teacher training that is focused on promoting professional knowledge and skills, and acceptable support systems for students with special needs. However, there is little evidence that this has been successful in making changes, beyond the school. In an inclusive educational setting special education students are provided with the opportunities to develop social interactions with their peers within the structure of the classroom and the schools. Yet, for the great majority of these students, their socialization with peers begins and ends at the school door.

The focus of this study will be to look for patterns of social development that assist some students to construct the transition into independent socialization, and to endeavor to distinguish factors that indicate why certain individuals are more successful with that transition. Individuals who were identified to receive special education services in the public schools in a predominately inclusive setting were the subjects of the research. Semi structured interviews with these adults and their families were conducted to gain insight into the patterns and paths that led to their current social status. Additionally, the researcher sought to recognize how the subjects perceive the notion of friendship and the significance that that social concept has in their lives.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Finally, I want to thank the participants in my research who allowed me to enter their lives and ask lots of questions. They were a constant inspiration to me, and I am so appreciative that they shared their stories with me. I have spent over 35 years as a teacher of special education; however, with each conversation, I learned a little more, and will hopefully continue to grow as an educator.

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my parents, Victor and Rose Mary Guccione, who taught me the value of an education.

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# CHAPTER 1

## **Purpose of the Study**

The educational community has developed many programs, support systems, and provided teacher training that is focused on promoting professional knowledge and skills, and adequate support systems for students identified with special needs. However, it is still not evident to this researcher, that there has been success in making changes globally beyond the school doors into general society. In an inclusive educational setting, students who receive special education services are provided with a variety of opportunities to develop social interactions with their peers within the structure of the classroom and the schools. These are generally structured by educators, and in many cases, with the assistance of paraprofessionals. Typical peers within the educational setting, however, rarely receive any direct support or instruction to develop their social skills in regard to these students with special needs. These peers most often have little understanding of the students' special needs, and how it impacts both their cognitive and social development. These factors create an artificial arena for social interactions that often come to a halt at the end of the school day. McDermott and Varenne (1995), noted that "For every skill people gain, there is another not developed; for every focus of attention, something is passed by; for every speciality, a corresponding lack" (Hulsebosch, 2009). This researcher would agree that the focus needs to shift from the child with a recognized "disability" to those we deem to be typical students if true inclusion is to exist.



### **Significance of the Problem**

Inclusion, when done well is much more than mainstreaming students with special needs into a classroom. It is more than providing modifications, accommodations, and the support of a special education teacher or a paraprofessional. According to Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo, mainstreaming needs to be a state of mind, a philosophy, and a social commitment to the child and the parents (2010). Mainstreaming is not just the supports that occur within the school building from nine to three. Most importantly, it is not just about the intellect.

It needs to be driven by "...a philosophy that urges schools, neighborhoods, and communities to welcome and value everyone, regardless of differences... and inclusion extends beyond the K – 12 school boundaries to people of all ages with disabilities... For inclusion to work, everyone within the target environments, including those with disabilities, must be equipped with the skills to be successful" (Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003, pp. 140-141).

Rodina's (2005) review of Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis (TD) noted "a positive *resource oriented approach* implies a favorable societal view on children with disabilities, giving preference to strengthening and empowerment of individual skills rather than the traditional stress on weaknesses or deviations" (p. 112).

Inclusion needs to be a belief system of a school as a learning community, which educates all their children to reach their potential (Wah, 2010). Bricker (2000) noted a variety of factors that determined the effectiveness of inclusion and suggested that at least three conditions need to be addressed to assure successful outcomes: (a) attitudes and beliefs, (b) professional knowledge and skills, and (c) adequate support systems ranging from professional development and collaboration to appropriate physical accommodations (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001, p. 147).

As an educator with more than 35 years of experience with students with special needs, it has been evident to this investigator, that for many of these students, their socialization with peers begins and ends at the school door. A review of how social skills are embedded into inclusive educational practices by Fenty, Miller, & Lampi (2008), indicated that while it is now educational practice to fully include students with special needs in the least restrictive environment, teachers are not likely to take away from academic time to focus on the social skills development component (Korinek & Popp, 1997). The support service for social skills is typically provided as pull out, rather than push in. Therefore, many of the skills, while taught, are occurring in isolation. This is not conducive to the generalization and maintenance of target skills, and creates a less successful outcome (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Lewis, 1994). This researcher agrees with the findings of many earlier studies that a critical component to promoting appropriate social behaviors requires that these strategies be incorporated into the academic curriculum for both typical students and those with special needs (Korinek & Popp, 1997).

As preschoolers and elementary students, peer interactions outside of school were typically arranged and guided by parents and other adults in controlled settings. As students enter middle school and move on to secondary education, the structure of the adult driven socialization evolves into one of increasing independence and is driven by peers and common ground. Unfortunately, this change does not always intuitively occur for students with disabilities. Once the organization provided by structured play dates and after school activities begins to dissolve, often the social life for far too many of these students diminishes substantially.

While the current educational model is more focused on full inclusion, there are still aspects that are not fully addressed. One of these is the social factor, and how to prepare both the students with special needs and the typical population to move from the classroom into a more inclusive life style.

### **Research Questions**

The focus of this confirmatory qualitative research was to endeavor to determine if there are patterns of social development that foster and allow some students to be able to make the transition into independent socialization with greater facility. Another goal was to establish whether factors can be identified that may suggest why some individuals are more successful in making the transition. In order to focus the study, two research questions were formulated:

1. What are some critical factors that may lead some students with disabilities to develop more socially appropriate skills that in turn contribute to socialization in the general community?
2. How can the educational system, through inclusion, foster and create a richer environment for these skills to develop?

### **Research Design**

This was a confirmatory case study to explore what assists students with disabilities to develop social skills that contribute to interacting positively with the

general community, and how educators can support that development to increase the likelihood of socialization into the adult community as they mature.

The subjects of this exploratory research were adult individuals who, during their educational period, were identified to receive special education services in the public schools, and received those services in a predominately inclusive setting. Additional participants included at least one family member who resided with the subject during their educational years. Semi structured interviews with adults and their families were conducted to gain insight into the patterns and paths that led to their current social status. Additionally, the interviews attempted to delve into how the subjects perceive the concept of friendship and the significance that that social concept has in their lives as adults. They were also asked to consider the role of peer relations throughout their adolescence both within the educationally setting and in the larger communities they belong to.

Subjects were provided with a packet that included a form from the University of Bridgeport to verify that IRB approval for the study had been received. They were also informed that there was no monetary compensation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Subjects were ensured that their privacy would be protected, their names would not be used, and the transcripts would be destroyed within 1 year of the dissertation defense.

Upon completing the interview sessions, the recordings were transcribed using online transcription services. Each subject was then provided with the written transcript of the interview to check for accuracy. Any necessary corrections were made. Subsequently, the approved transcript was checked for themes by the interviewer, and

preliminary themes were determined. The purpose of this was to look for additional topics that may have emerged and should be addressed in follow up interviews, as well as assessing if there were any common threads among the perceptions of the subjects.

The list of possible themes was examined for commonality in order to create a definitive list of themes that could be analyzed throughout all interviews. The transcripts were then reread and coded to align with the final set of themes, and create a criterion code. A criterion code is one established by the researcher and is used to measure the proportion of agreement among the coder responses (Crittenden and Hill, 1971). Each set of transcripts (subject and family member) was given to a fellow researcher/educator to code for these themes and increase validity. All readers were provided with the same training and sample to ensure that there was consistency among the readers thereby increasing reliability of the data and the validity of the findings.

Following another review of the codes, a table of themes was created to analyze the data. The data was used to answer the two research questions that were essential to the purpose of the study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder** - ADHD is described as “a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with development, has symptoms presenting in two or more settings (e.g. at home, school, or work), and negatively impacts directly on social, academic or occupational functioning”. The symptoms must be present before age 12 (DSM V, 2013).

**Autism Spectrum Disorder** – Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across context, not accounted for by general developmental delays, and manifest by 3 of 3 systems (DSM V, 2013).

**Cerebral palsy** - An inclusive term that describes a group of nonprogressive disorders occurring in young children in which abnormalities of the brain cause impairment of motor function. The impairment of motor function may result in paresis, involuntary movement, or incoordination (DSM V, 2013).

**Down Syndrome** – A genetic disorder caused when abnormal cell division results in extra genetic material from chromosome 21. This genetic disorder, which varies in severity, causes lifelong intellectual disability and developmental delays, and in some people it causes health problems (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>).

**Inclusion** – The practice of providing education for students with special needs in the least restrictive educational (LRE) setting; typically the general education classroom with appropriate supports. LRE means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports, referred to as "supplementary aids and services," along with their nondisabled peers in the school they would attend if not disabled, unless a student's individualized education program (IEP) requires some other arrangement <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/lre/faqs.inclusion.htm> .

**Intellectual Disability** - significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

**Orthopedic Impairment** - a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures) <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

**Other Health Impaired** - having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorder** - This category should be used when there is a severe and pervasive impairment in the development of reciprocal social interaction or verbal and nonverbal communication skills, or when stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities are present, but the criteria are not met for a specific pervasive developmental disorder, schizophrenia, schizotypal personality disorder, or avoidant personality disorder. For example, this category includes "atypical autism" --presentations that do not

meet the criteria for autistic disorder because of late age of onset, atypical symptomatology, or subthreshold symptomatology, or all of these (DSM V, 2013).

**Socialization** - The process by which a human being beginning at infancy acquires the habits, beliefs, and accumulated knowledge of society through education and training for adult status <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> .

**Specific Learning Disability** - distinct disorders which interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following academic skills: oral language, reading, written language, or mathematics (DSM V, 2013).

**Special Education** - The practice of educating students with [special needs](#) in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. Ideally, this process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings. These interventions are designed to help learners with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and their community, than may be available if the student were only given access to a typical classroom education <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to a very small sample of subjects from Fairfield and New Haven Counties, Connecticut. While the effort was made to reach a much larger population using an organization with over 1,000 recipients on its email list, SPED\* NET Wilton, the responding pool of potential subjects was extremely small, <1%. This researcher made the effort, to seek out additional subjects through personal and professional contacts. The resulting sample was 7 adults who had received their education primarily in the Connecticut Public Schools, and at least 1 family member for each subject. These individuals had been classified at some point during their education to qualify for special education services, and represented at least 5 federally recognized areas of special education <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

These were previously defined, and included individuals identified as:

- Autism
- Intellectually Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impaired
- Specific Learning Disabilities

This researcher believes that while the sample is very small, it is representative of students who may be identified to receive special education services. Therefore, the potential exists that these findings may apply to a larger sampling in a future study. Efforts were also taken to give the subjects and their family a voice, and all individuals are considered adults and were able to reflect upon some aspects and circumstances of their personal and educational experiences.



## Chapter 2

### **Inclusion**

According to Friend (2006), a transition from adult support to peer support must exist in order for inclusion to truly be a viable philosophy in education. It is vital that all students, those classified with a disability as well as typical, be empowered to accept differences and reap the benefits that come with reaching their potential. “Successful inclusion and participation in lessons and in the life of the school depends to a large extent on other children” (Charema, p.91 2010). It is with this in mind that schools must learn to educate all students both socially as well as academically.

Mittler (2000) points out that inclusion is based on a value system that welcomes and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language of origin, social background, level of educational achievement or disability. Booth (1999) argues that “...it is a process of increasing participation of learners and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures and communities of neighbourhood mainstream centers of learning” (Charema, 2010, p. 88)

There have been many studies on how children with special needs interact with their typical peers within the school setting. The majority of these have been conducted at the preschool and elementary level. The research conducted at the secondary level is sparse and seems to indicate that the socialization skills learned in earlier education have not been internalized as students enter adolescents (Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntingon, McMillan & Brent, 2001; Kennedy & Horn, 2004). Positive peer relationships often fail to develop and students with disabilities may be excluded from social activities that occur

on the playground and after school in the larger community (Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008).

One component of inclusion is the daily physical and social contact that is made among students. Within the structure of the school, this contact is characteristically teacher driven through group work or pairing of students, and often with the direct support of the paraprofessional. Although, this has generally been positive, there is often little to no extension of socialization outside of school once the students enter the secondary level. In their study, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) concluded that contact alone is not enough, nor does it lead to the desired outcomes of positive peer interactions. “The benefits of contact between students with and without disabilities typically do not occur without system – level support for inclusion” (Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008, p. 306).

Honig and Wittmer (1996) developed a strategic plan to promote a better model for inclusion, which they stated, needed to be ‘deliberate and comprehensive’. Within that structure, they recommended that teachers design lesson plans to promote caring along very specific guidelines. These included the concept of a hero/role model, an individual who seeks to interact positively with peers, and activities to help students internalize what caring means and how that looks. Additionally other research expresses the similar belief that “...skills are needed to develop communication and interaction among students, that these must demonstrate that caring is an attitude, and that its purpose is to encourage friendships” (Cooper, Griffith, & Filer, 1999, p. 114).

## **Victimization**

Bullying is an area that both schools and the communities at large have begun to address more vigorously and aggressively. Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Raun & Scheidt (2003) have identified 3 crucial elements consistently cited by research that need to be present in order for bullying to occur: repetition, harm, and unequal power. Increasing social understanding of peers and minimizing the social vulnerability of students with ASD (autism spectrum disorders) due to their lack of social cues is needed (Sofronoff, Dark, & Stone, 2011, p. 16). Ochs (2011) stated that intellectually high-level students on the Autism spectrum were well aware of their peers' behavior toward them despite their difficulty interpreting social cues. These students were able to identify instances when they were nagged, rejected, ignored or bullied by their peers. For ASD students as well as all students with disabilities, bullying becomes a more complex issue due to their difficulties in processing social situations.

Deficits in processing can place any student with disabilities in more vulnerable situations. The current inclusive educational model has removed the protective "doors" of the self-contained special education classroom and therefore schools, educators, and advocates must demand a higher level of vigilance to ensure that students with disabilities are not only protected, but also taught social skills and strategies to deal with bullying. "The combination of poor social skills and repeated bullying puts these children in a situation, which increases the likelihood of experiencing social and emotional problems during adolescence and adulthood" (Casale, p. 4 2008)

Children with disabilities are more likely to experience violence, and they have an increased risk for being victimized (Nabuzoka & Smith, (1993); Yude, Goodman, R.,

McConachie, (1998); Sobsey, (1994); Martlew & Hudson, (1991); O'Moore & Hillery, (1989); Whitney, Smith & Thompson, (1994). Since students with disabilities are often included in both structured and unstructured educational settings, they are more exposed to potential attacks from peers "... student with learning problems are overly represented in the victim population" (da Costa & Gil, 2010, p. 148). Hoover, Oliver, & Thompson (1993) stated that the most frequently observed reason that bullies choose a victim is that he/she is perceived as not fitting in. In addition, Smith, Bowers, Binney & Cowie (1993) noted that in most of the cases dealing with bullying of students with special needs, the victims tended to misinterpret ambiguous social situations.

### **Peer Relations**

Focusing on a more constructive side, students with disabilities may also develop stronger peer relationships within an inclusive setting that promotes social skills for all students, and these can provide a valuable tool in promoting greater acceptance between both groups. This has been documented in studies where non – disabled peers have served as models for students on the Autism spectrum, (Odom & Strain, 1984) and helped them to develop more appropriate social skills (Reiter & Vitani, 2007). However, too often the social interactions among students have had a limited interactive component. These tended to be more one sided and were more likely to have the regular education student offering academic support to the student with special needs rather than

being true social interactions (Place & Hodge, 2004; Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008).

At the middle school level among boys, contact with between students with special needs and typical peers had almost no carry over to socialization outside of school. Boys at this age are looking for socially competent peers; ones whose interests are complimentary to theirs. In the secondary setting, involvement in organized sports changes to a more competitive level, which is based on athletic prowess. Interactions are more spontaneous and require higher-level social skills that many students with disabilities have not developed. At this level, parent driven playtime is no longer the dominant format that middle school students desire. This significantly limits non-school time opportunities for socialization (Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008).

Peer training can greatly improve caring and socialization among students of all levels. This is especially true of students on the Autism spectrum, most specifically those with Asperger's syndrome. Students with learning disabilities and those with mild disabilities are often not noticed by their peers. They may 'pass' socially. However, the opposite may be true for students with pervasive developmental disorders. In these cases, those with Asperger's are often just considered different, strange or simply social misfits. They almost fit in but as peers mature; their dearth of social development widens the gap. This can be especially true when bullying is verbal in nature. Students with ASD may fail to interpret what is happening to them as bullying, and therefore incidents go unreported (Humphrey & Symes, 2011).

Peer training is the most likely intervention to help increase positive social interactions among typical peers and those with disabilities (Owen-DeSchryver, Carr,

Cale, & Blakeley-Smith, 2008). Concerted efforts to training a small group of non – disabled peers can cultivate change in their schools. If peers are well trained, a small group may further impact untrained peers. This can minimize the need to provide significant instructional resources for social skills instruction for the students with disabilities (Owen-DeSchryver, Carr, Cale, & Blakeley-Smith, 2008). Programs with a proven track record of addressing bullying issues “...have the potential to offer many opportunities to transform students’ attitudes and behaviors, intergroup relationships, and social institutions and policies; yet this potential is often not realized” (da Costa & Gil, 2010, p. 152). Having a friend can help reduce the likelihood of being victimized in the first place (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999).

There have been many studies that indicate that inclusion fosters stronger socialization skills for all students (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Gonzalez-Lopez & Kamps, 1997; Filiippatou & Kaldi, 2010). However Nakken and Pijil (2002) reviewed studies of inclusion and found the literature to be contradictory as to whether inclusionary classrooms enhanced social contact, and if the children with special needs actually developed friendships with their non – disabled peers (Press, 2008).

It is well documented that inclusive education overall, has positive outcomes for both students with disabilities and typical peers (Hehir & Katzman, 2012; Ferri, 2009; Berube, 1996; Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013). For inclusive educational programs to be effective, they must include “...positive attitudes, strong partnerships between parents and educators, and the use of appropriate interventions to address students’ needs...” (Loiacono & Valenti, 2010, p. 25). However, there is also a significant decline in parent/teacher communication and involvement from the

elementary school to secondary level (Patel & Stevens, 2010, p. 118). It is with this change in mind that the socialization needs of students with all types of disabilities need to be aggressively addressed and actively promoted with their non-disabled peers.

### **Role of Theory**

The psychology of children and adolescence is intertwined in every aspect of education, and key theorists have emerged over the years as dominant influences on past and current practices in schools. Two of these are Urie Bronfenbrenner and Lev Vygotsky. Their work on the social cultural development of children and the application of their theories on education has impacted many of our current educational practices. In order to better understand how students, both typical and those with disabilities, develop socially, and to also determine whether current educational practices are developmentally appropriate, it is important to become familiar with the seminal work of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky. Following that, it is imperative that there be a review of the current studies that have been formulated on those theories (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007, Cole, 1985, Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003, Gresham, Elliott, Cook, Vance, & Kettler, 2010, Ryan & Shim, 2008, Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008, Swick & Williams, 2006).

The Ecological Model designed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 is best viewed as concentric circles embedded within each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This begins with the first relationships that a child has within a family with his/her parents, and develops into an ever-increasing number of influences over the years. For the purpose of this study,

the focus will be on the development that occurs in the mesosystem and exosystem.

(Barton, 2003) (Bellini, Peters, & Hopf, 2007)

**Mesosystem** – According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), this circle grows out from the center of the child’s world and can be thought of as a “system of systems” (p. 39). These include the overlap of school to home and school to peer groups.

**Exosystem** – A defining point of the exosystem is that it must include at least two settings. One of these must not be a direct microsystem that involves the individual. For a child it might include the direct relationship with parent as well as the parent’s workplace. The parent’s interaction with the child is influenced by hours of work, stress and other factors. An example of a larger exosystem can be seen in the relationship that exists for the parent with the school, child and child’s peers. Although the parent may not interact directly with the microsystems of the school and the child’s peers, the child will bring the effect of those systems into the parent’s world. (Bronfenbrenner, Ecological Models of Human Development, 1994)

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory presents an organized method to support his belief that the interpersonal relations that a child experiences will shape who they are and who they may become. Bronfenbrenner (1972) stated that it is through these systems “that a child acquires new interests and skills and learns the meaning of tolerance, cooperation, and compassion” (Bronfenbrenner, p. 663, 1999).

Gallagher (1999) noted that Vygotsky envisioned three ways that culture was passed on to children.

These included:

- Imitative learning (parent/teacher to child)



- Instructed learning (adult to child)
- Collaborative learning (peer to peer)

Social interaction involves both the environment and cognition (As cited in McLeod, 2007). This in turn leads to a change in a child's thought and behavior. Four basic principles were seminal to Vygotsky's social cultural development. First, he believed that children construct their knowledge from their experiences and interactions. Secondly, that development cannot be separated from the context or framework that established the interaction. Thirdly, Vygotsky believed that learning was mediated; it did not flow in a straight line, but rather is influenced by individuals and environment. Lastly, language plays a central role in an individual's mental development. (As cited in Cole, 1985).

Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner believed strongly in the influence that proximal relationships have on a child's development (Gedler, 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Cole, 1985). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, which was strongly influenced by Vygotsky, was formulated with two propositions that related to the proximal process. In the first, which is applicable to this study, he saw the proximal process as enduring interactions between children and others in their immediate environment. This formation of a relationship was found in three sources: "...the person, the environment and the desired nature of the outcome for a task" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 38).

When Vygotsky's work was translated into English, it became evident that his model of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) had been conceptualized on a similar path to Bronfenbrenner's (Gedler, 2009). Although he did not envision concentric circles, Vygotsky also saw the proximal zone as imperative to a child's development. It

was this passing of knowledge from a more knowledgeable other (MKO) that created the link from a child's actual development to their potential development (Gallagher, 1999). The ZPD included two components that were necessary for it to be successful. The MKO needed to have subjectivity with the child; a level of understanding on the task to be accomplished needed to be clarified. Also, the MKO needed to scaffold the relationship to allow the child to move from support, to progressing, to mastery of the task (Gallagher, 1999).

A noteworthy difference between the two theorists is Vygotsky's emphasis on the component of language. Vygotsky believed that "the acquisition of language was the most influential moment in a child's life" (Gallagher, 1999, p. 8). A child's speech begins as an imitation of sound. This learning process from the MKO allows the child to begin the proximal process. Vygotsky saw two critical roles in cognitive development that were directly influenced by language. First, language is the main conduit for the MKO to transmit information, and secondly as a potent tool for the intellectual development of the child. Language is an accelerator to thinking and understanding (McLeod, 2007). A young child's self-talk is fundamental in helping them to plan and guide their behavior to accomplish a task. This changes over time into a whisper and finally into a thought; moving the child to a higher level of cognitive functioning (Gallagher, 1999).

In understanding the theories of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner relative to language and cognitive development, it is important to understand the implication that their works have had on the current policy of inclusion of identified children in the educational mainstream. In both theorists' concepts of the proximal process and Zone of

Proximal Development there are elements to consider (Gedler, 2009). In an inclusionary educational setting, the MKO may very likely be a peer within the classroom. This can be observed in a setting where collaborative groups are fostered. While there are benefits for all the students, the more skillful peers within a special education student's Zone of Proximal Development may also be the MKO as well as the teacher.

If language is the most significant component for cognitive development (McLeod, 2007), it is vital that an educator be cognizant of the identified student's current stage in his/her language development. While all students in a classroom are within the same microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994); the student with special needs may not yet be processing language at the necessary level for cognition to take place (Cole, 1985). This can influence the relationship between the peers and needs to be carefully monitored (Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990; Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008; Ryan & Shim, 2008; Gresham, Elliott, Cook, Vance, & Kettler, 2010; Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoen, 2003).

### **Socialization and Friendship**

There is literature that has analyzed the socialization of students on the Autism spectrum within the structure of school (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007; Boutot, 2007; Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001; Cooper, Griffith, & Filer, 1999; Gonzalez-Lopez & Kamps, 1997; Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Osborne & Reed, 2011; Reiter & Vitani, 2007; da Costa & Gil, 2010; Wah, 2010). Several empirically based studies have also looked at inclusion for students with other disabilities in structured programs outside of

the school walls (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2003; Murphy & Carbone, 2008; Keisner, Poulin, & Nicotra, 2003).

Another aspect that must be examined is that of friendship among children and adolescents and how it is perceived and its impact on social growth. There have been several studies that have been conducted with the goal of investigating friendship. Berndt (2002) conducted a study that examined whether friendship itself was more likely to have a positive outcome in a child's life. He looked at both positive and negative friendships and concluded "...friendships may enhance children's development regardless of the characteristics of those friends" (Berndt, 2002, p. 10). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the development of friendships is necessary for a child's emotional and psychological growth (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Gottman, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975; Berndt, 2002; Buhrmester, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1993).

Additionally, Newcomb & Bagwell (1995) noted that problem solving skills which are needed in developing a friendship, require the participants to exchange viewpoints and ideas leading to cognitive development. Newcomb & Bagwell (1995) also identified three aspects of emotional development that emerged through friendship.

First, friendship offers a venue to the expression of emotion to teach children how to appropriately display and regulate emotions. Secondly, positive friendships are characterized by greater equality and less dominance... Thirdly, friendships offer a more intense emotional experience than do general peer relations (p. 338-339).

Research demonstrates that the ability of children to develop friendships moves beyond the realm of simply having a companion or playmate. Valuable learning and life skills emerge from forming friendships and social relationships with peers. "...*high friends* children are able to communicate to a listener what they are talking about..." (Gottman, et.al., 1975, p. 716) Therefore, while inclusion may promote social acceptance

among peers within the educational setting, does it indeed prepare the student with special needs to become a “friend”? This is an important distinction according to Parker & Asher (1993). “...friendships may meet children’s needs for intimacy, social support...while peer acceptance may be a prerequisite for leadership, assertive skills and the need to feel part of a larger community” (p. 621).

## CHAPTER 3

### **Problem**

As stated in Chapter 1, inclusion needs to be a belief system of a school as a learning community; with the goal of educating all children to reach their potential (Wah, 2010). One of the themes consistently referred to by families of the subjects, was the element of potential. Families that reported more positive outcomes from inclusion had a broader and more realistic concept of their child's potential. This included not only the academic fragment but emotional, social, as well as a motivational component.

Bricker (2000) noted a variety of factors that determined the effectiveness of inclusion and suggested that at least three conditions need to be addressed to assure successful outcomes: (a) attitudes and beliefs, (b) professional knowledge and skills, and (c) adequate support systems ranging from professional development and collaboration to appropriate physical accommodations (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001, p. 147). This researcher's review of the interviews substantiates the importance of these three areas for individuals in making the transition from inclusion at the educational level to inclusion as a lifestyle.

### **Theory**

This researcher sought to find some consistency among individuals with disabilities, who were educated in an inclusionary educational setting, with the purpose of determining which factors may contribute to transitioning to an inclusive lifestyle as an

adult. The initial premise was that despite the effort of schools to practice inclusion, there is not enough meaningful, appropriate, and sufficient training to carry over into the real world and community. It is only with significant effort on the part of families and other advocates that in-roads to an inclusive lifestyle occur.

One of the shortcomings of inclusion in the educational setting includes the perception of friendship. Do schools see inclusion as a precursor or prelude to developing friendships? What, ultimately is the goal of inclusion? This researcher believes that too often, that element is not considered to be part of the equation; when instead, it should be one of the most basic and fundamental goals. In their study, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) concluded that contact alone is not enough, nor does it lead to the desired outcomes of positive peer interactions. “The benefits of contact between students with and without disabilities typically do not occur without system – level support for inclusion” (Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008, p. 306).

There has not been a broad amount of data from research at the secondary level as it pertains to the social development of children with special needs. However, what has been explored, does indicate that these students may not intuitively internalize socialization skills from their earlier years as they enter adolescents, when compared to their peers (Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntingon, McMillan & Brent, 2001; Kennedy & Horn, 2004). The long reaching positive peer relationships generally seen with typical peers, often fail to progress as the emotional and intellectual gap widens, and students with disabilities may not make the transition into social groups as students move from elementary into secondary educational settings without supports and interventions. (Kalymon, Gettinger, & Hanley-Maxwell, 2008, p. 305).

This qualitative case study attempted to focus on what factors can be identified to create that passage from the educational model of inclusion to an adulthood, which justly can be classified as an inclusive lifestyle.

In qualitative research, the investigator must be mindful of many factors that may not be as easily identifiable as in quantitative studies. In conducting qualitative research, Maxwell (1996) refers to the purpose of validity to "...how you will rule out particular plausible alternatives to your interpretation..." (p. 88). He also mentions that the two greatest threats to validity in qualitative research are researcher bias and reactivity. It is essential that this researcher is aware of her own opinions and beliefs, and to acknowledge when this may be impacting how the information is perceived. In understanding researcher reactivity, Maxwell states, "...the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence but to understand it and to use it productively" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91). Attention to reliability and validity in qualitative research equates to credibility.

This researcher analyzed the data from the perspective of the subjects as well as their parents in an attempt to identify how family views have shaped the subjects' relationships with peers and their social skills development. Creswell (2007) notes that research that falls under the umbrella of social constructivism leads towards complex views and will "...rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (p. 20). A constructivist paradigm leads the researcher to acknowledge that there are multiple realities to be discovered, *ontology*, and that the researcher and participants will develop a greater understanding of the phenomena, *epistemology* (Denzin & Lincoln,



1994). These beliefs lead this researcher to acknowledge that the design of this research study falls into the paradigm of constructivist-interpretive.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Creswell (2012) states the reliability in research requires that the instruments used for evaluation provide stable and consistent scores. He continues to define validity in research as demanding that the interpretation of these scores be based upon sound evidence and that the use of these measurements matches the purpose it was intended for.

Reliability and validity in qualitative research is not as definitive as that in quantitative research, but should be considered as stringently. For example, when interviewing or surveying individuals, the researcher should consider: time of day, fatigue, location and other variables that may impact the results. Similarly, in observations, the researcher needs to note any factors that may decrease the reliability. These might include an individual's extended absence from a group, whether a pre-test was administered, as well as the researcher's mindset on a particular day. The reliability in qualitative research demands great consideration from the researcher to be open-minded and vigilant. This may require checking transcripts multiple times, carefully coding the information and relying on the participants to member check for accuracy. To ensure validity in qualitative research, it is necessary to "use rich, thick description to convey the findings." (Creswell, 2009, p. 191)

In qualitative research, while validity is not less important, the researcher must be mindful of many factors which may not be as easily identifiable as in quantitative studies. In conducting qualitative research, Maxwell (1996) refers to the purpose of validity to

“...how you will rule out particular plausible alternatives to your interpretation...” He also mentions that the two greatest threats to validity in qualitative research are researcher bias and reactivity. It is essential that the researcher be aware of her own opinions and beliefs, and to know when this may be impacting how the information is perceived. In understanding researcher reactivity, Maxwell states, “...the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence but to understand it and to use it productively.” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91) Attention to reliability and validity in qualitative research equates to credibility.

In order to ensure credibility, it will be very important to develop questions that allow the participants to answer freely and be rich and thick enough to provide for emerging codes. The data for this qualitative study met that criteria. Subjects were provided with semi-formal questions to guide the interview but were allowed to expand on topics and given the time to explain their responses. Several hours were spent with both subjects and at least one family member in order to create data that could be used to develop codes that were reflective of the interviews. Additionally, this researcher took field notes following each interview that could be referred to when listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts.

Maxwell provides various checks to ensure that researcher's bias and reflexivity are considered. These include being aware of discrepant data that may not fit into the theory but must be addressed and considered. Triangulation in regards to number of subjects may not be inordinate, however Fielding (1986) noted that recognizing the fallibility of data is as important and greater numbers may only provide a false sense of security. (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94)

This study followed a transactional approach in determining validity. A transactional approach looks for active participation between the researcher and subjects, and attains this by using member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) and triangulation (Denizen '1989). This study followed the premise that "...researchers guided by transactional validity criteria pursue the likelihood that there is a possibility for greater, more accurate, objective truth... (Cho & Trent (2006) p. 323).

Member checks provided for the subjects to review their input by reading the transcripts and agreeing on the interpretation of the information by the researcher. In order to do this, each subject was provided with a written transcript of the interview. Following that, this researcher coded the transcript and also provided that information to the subject in order to reach consensus on the data. While some of the data may have been able to be coded with more than one theme, the subjects did not express any difficulty with this researcher's choice of coding following an explanation of how that choice was made.

The ability of a researcher to set aside their own experiences in reviewing data is referred to as bracketing. In this study, this was achieved by allowing each transcript to be read and coded by at least two other readers. Following this, any discrepant codes were reviewed by all readers and consensus reached. Any portion of the transcript that could not be coded in agreement was discarded.

Triangulation allows for the researcher to verify facts through multiple data sources. Information provided by the subjects was corroborated via a family member. Additionally, when possible, this researcher was able to review Individual Education Plan

(IEP) minutes to verify responses from subjects. Specifically, this was done to determine whether there was documentation of providing parents with guidelines regarding the transitional process. Subsequently, contact was made with the special education administrator for the district of the dissatisfied parents regarding the same documentation. Cho and Trent (2006) noted that pairing member checks and triangulation could help ensure the possibility "...that there is an absolute, perceived existence of validity in its own right" (p. 388)

### **Research Questions**

The study looks towards finding data to answer two essential questions:

1. What are some critical factors that may lead some students with disabilities to develop more socially appropriate skills that in turn contribute to socialization in the general community?
2. How can the educational system, through inclusion, foster and create a richer environment for these skills to develop?

### **Rationale**

While research does indicate that there are significant benefits for both students with disabilities and typical peers, this researcher believes that it was vital to hear the voices of those who navigated the system as students, as well as their family members. One of the primary objectives of this research was to gain a better understanding of why certain individuals developed better socialization skills and established friendships, and

therefore attained potentially greater personal fulfillment. This knowledge might generate a greater understanding and assist the researcher to generate changes in the educational setting.

### **Sampling**

The subjects were chosen as a convenience sampling of available participants following attempts to locate a purposeful group of participants. They were recruited through word of mouth, direct emails to members of SPED\*NET Wilton (<http://spednetwilton.org/>) dedicated to supporting parents of individuals with disabilities (see Appendix A), and through connections provided by other educators. Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2012) note that the use of a purposeful sampling may provide increased strength to a case study as the participants are selected on the basis of how much can be learned from their personal experiences.

While the email from SPED\*NET Wilton was sent out to over 1,000 members and staff, only two subjects were obtained through that method. Two subjects were found through personal connections from the researcher's advisors, and the remaining three were chosen through personal connections of the researcher. Attempts to initiate conversations with two other potential subjects (a brother and sister on the Autism Disorder Spectrum) were denied by a parent who retains legal guardianship over his adult children.

The convenience sampling of subjects was:

**S1** – 29 year old male with Down syndrome who was educated in the Connecticut public schools in both general education settings and special education classes. He has an intact family with two siblings (one younger, one older), and no physical limitations (he has participated in a triathlon). This individual is currently employed part time and lives at home.

**S2** – 24 year old female with cerebral palsy who was educated in a fully inclusive setting with the support of a paraprofessional in the Connecticut public schools. She is currently enrolled in the local community college, and has hired her own companion to assist her. Subject utilizes a motorized wheel chair and iPad for communication (text to speech). She has an intact family, two siblings (one younger, one older), and lives at home. She pays for her aide, transportation as needed (CT transport services for disabled), and also pays her parents a small stipend using SSI funds. Her parents have assisted her in creating a budget to aid her in monitoring her finances.

**S3** – 29 year old bilingual male who, according to his mother, was identified by Connecticut public schools with PDD (pervasive developmental disorder). He has no physical limitations and was educated primarily in CT public schools with minimal inclusion in the general setting. Subject was outplaced for grades 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> at F\_\_\_\_\_ School (private educational setting with a focus on special needs students with developmental disorders, language and social needs). This individual drives his own car and lives at home with his mother (Spanish speaking only), and older brother. While he

has been employed in the past, subject is not currently employed at the time of the interview, but is seeking future employment.

**S4** – 22 year old male who was originally labeled as being on the Autism Spectrum by Birth to 3 program. That label was changed to Learning Disabled with Attention Deficit Disorder when subject entered Connecticut public schools. He was educated primarily in CT public schools in a fully inclusive setting with one/one paraprofessional support (PreK- 5<sup>th</sup> grade), and other interventions (OT, Speech). Subject was outplaced for middle school at E\_\_\_\_\_ H\_\_\_\_\_, at parent's request due to the schools low teacher/student ratio, and focus on reading development. Subject is currently a senior at M\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_ College with a Fine Arts/Theater major, and is expected to graduate in May 2015. He resides in an apartment near the college with roommates and has an intact family with one older sibling.

**S5** – 19 year old bilingual (Spanish/English) male, who was originally identified with PDD, but identified on the Autism Spectrum in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He has been educated in Connecticut public schools since preschool with full inclusion until 8<sup>th</sup> grade with some paraprofessional support and additional OT and Speech services. Currently, subject is a senior in high school and will remain there until he is 21. During high school, his classes have been in both the general education setting and special education classes. He has an intact family with both English and Spanish spoken in the home. Subject resides with parents and one older sibling.

**S6** – 24 year old male who was identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (language based); but did meet the criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, family did not agree with that diagnosis and LD was considered the primary label. He

was educated exclusively in the Connecticut public schools in the general educational setting with special education resource support through high school. Subject graduated from E\_\_\_\_\_ C\_\_\_\_\_ in Boston with a degree in communications. At the time of the interview, the subject was seeking employment but was pursuing freelance journalism by writing articles for local community newspaper. He lives at home with a younger sibling and has an intact family.

S7 – 29 year old male who was identified on the Autism Spectrum and was educated exclusively in the Connecticut public schools. Educational setting has had limited inclusion in the general education setting except for electives and physical education. He is currently employed and drives himself to work. Subject lives with parents at home, but is still socially involved with his older sibling who lives nearby.

Subjects were contacted and agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix B). In order to analysis the information from the subject interviews, digital recordings were transcribed and member checked for accuracy. Guba and Lincoln (1989) noted that using the system of member checks may assist the researcher in ruling out misinterpretation of the subjects' intended meaning and ensure that their perspective was clearly presented.

### **Themes**

Following the interview process, preliminary themes were coded and then narrowed down into eight categories. The first six are considered to have a positive impact, while the last two were be detrimental to the subjects' ability to develop appropriate socialization with peers. The themes were:



1. **Family** – supports/interventions of parents, siblings, and extended family
2. **Motivation** – self-advocacy, awareness, affirmation, validation, and personal goals
3. **Socialization** – sports, community, activities, work, social media, and other interests/hobbies
4. **Future Independence** – planning, job training, life goals
5. **Friendships** – peer relationships, role models, other positive relationships
6. **Education (plus)** – teachers, early interventions, job training, support services
7. **Education (negative)** – teachers, lack of training, supports or other educational deficits defined
8. **Roadblocks** – obstacles that were overcome, or to be overcome in the future

### **Procedure**

Transcripts were reread to analyze responses and code with greater accuracy. Subsequently, other educators read transcript sets, subject plus family member, to validate the findings of the study. Crittenden & Hill (1971) defined coding as “...a process whereby persons assign data to categories in order to provide a basic measurement procedure for analysis” (p. 1073).

The three individuals who were asked to read and code sets of transcripts were provided with at least one set that was also read and coded by another individual to

ensure that every set of transcripts was validated by this researcher and two other readers. Two of the readers have already earned doctoral degrees, while the third is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. All three readers are educators currently employed in the Connecticut public schools.

Coding must be objective and reproducible to increase intercoder reliability. Cho (2008) noted that intercoder reliability was the degree to which two or more independent coders agree. To accomplish this, a training format was developed to ensure consistency among the readers. This included viewing a video on how to code, <https://youtu.be/DRL4PF2u9XA>, a packet that included a description of the subjects and an explanation of the themes to code (see Appendix C). There was also a training session for each individual that included reading the same sample transcript, coding for the potential themes and then a discussion to compare codes that this researcher had previously assigned to the sample transcript. Readers signed a waiver stating that they had voluntarily agreed to participate in the coding process and would comply with the required format (see Appendix D).

Upon receipt of the findings from the other readers, this researcher read the transcripts again, in order to check for passages and codes that emerged. Passages from the transcripts that exemplified the themes and were consistent among all the readers were identified. Only codes that were identified by 2 or more readers to be consistent with the coding criterion were used to analyze the data. Increasing intercoder reliability in the analysis of open-ended responses is necessary for the findings to be considered objective and valid (Cho, 2008).

## Chapter 4

### Summary of Objective

This researcher's goal was an endeavor to determine whether there are notable patterns in the social development of adults who were identified with special needs during their education that are advantageous in assisting them to make the transition into independent socialization. The researcher interviewed a purposeful sampling of adults between the ages of 19 and 29, and at least 1 family member for each subject. Comments presented are attributed to the subjects (**S**), parents (**P**), or sibling (**Sib**) and identified as such.

In order to better understand the subjects' backgrounds, and how these factors may or may not have impacted their ability to develop socially acceptable behaviors, two tables have been provided. The subjects and their families provided the information. It is anticipated that there will be some similarities among subjects with like circumstances. Table 1 provides descriptive information regarding the subjects, while the second table refers to their parents and provides a more descriptive picture of their educational and socio-economics circumstances.

**Table 1***Description of Subjects*

	<b>Gender and Age at time of study</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Educational summary</b>	<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Family status</b>
<b>Subject 1 (S1)</b>	Male, 29	Intellectually Disabled, Down Syndrome	CT public schools; general ed setting with supports and spec. ed classes	Transitional program at CT State College until 21	Yes, part time	Intact family, 2 siblings
<b>Subject 2 (S2)</b>	Female, 24	Cerebral palsy	CT public schools, full inclusion with paraprofessional support	Enrolled at G__ Community College	No, full time student	Intact family, 2 siblings
<b>Subject 3 (S3)</b>	Male, 29	Pervasive Developmental Disorder	CT public schools special education classes; Foundation School (gr. 6-8)	Grade 12	No, currently in training program	Single parent, 1 older brother Home language - Spanish
<b>Subject 4 (S4)</b>	Male, 22	Birth - 3: Autism Spectrum, changed to ADD in Kindergarten	CT public schools full inclusion with para support in elem. Eagle Hill (gr. 6-8, returned to public high school with tutoring support	Fine Arts/Theater major, expected graduation 5/15	No, full time student	Intact family, 1 sibling
<b>Subject 5 (S5)</b>	Male, 19	Autism Spectrum Disorder	CT public schools; general ed setting with supports and spec. ed classes	Grade 12	Yes, part time	Intact bilingual family 1 sibling

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	<b>Gender and Age at time of study</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Educational summary</b>	<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Family status</b>
<b>Subject 6 (S6)</b>	Male, 24	Specific Learning Disability	CT public schools, full inclusion with paraprofessional support	Communications major - graduated E__ College, 2014	Yes, part time	Intact family, 1 sibling
<b>Subject 7 (S7)</b>	Male, 29	Autism Spectrum Disorder	CT public schools special education classes	Grade 12	Yes, full time	Intact family, 1 sibling

\* *Currently labeled as Autism Spectrum Disorder*

\*\* *Segregated special education school for individuals with ASD*

\*\*\* *Private school for students with learning disabilities*

+ *Community placement*

+ + *Freelance journalist*

**Table 2***Description of Parents*

	<b>Role</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Highest level of Education</b>	<b>Demographics</b>
<b>Parent 1 (P1)</b>	Mother	Special Education Teacher	Doctoral degree	Middle class, intact family. Homeowners, New Haven County, CT
<b>Parent 2 (P2)</b>	Mother	Behavior Modification Specialist, CT Dept. of Developmental Services	Post graduate	Middle class intact family. Homeowners, New Haven County, CT
<b>Parent 3 (P3)</b>	Mother	Not currently employed, on disability	High school	Divorced, single parent, non English-speaking. Renter, Fairfield County, CT
<b>Parent 4 (P4)</b>	Mother	Attorney	Law School	Upper middle class, intact family. Homeowners, Fairfield County, CT
<b>Parent 5 (P5)</b>	Mother	Administrative Assistant	Post graduate	Middle class, bilingual, intact family. Homeowners, Fairfield County, CT
<b>Parent 6 (P6)</b>	Mother	Stay at home mother (at time of subject's education)	Post graduate	Upper middle class, intact family. Homeowners, Fairfield County, CT
<b>Parent 7 (P7)</b>	Mother	Stay at home mother (at time of subject's education)	College	Upper middle class, intact family. Homeowners, Fairfield County, CT

**Table 3***Description of Sibling*

	<b>Role</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Highest level of Education</b>	<b>Demographics</b>
<b>Sib 7</b>	Older brother to Subject 7	7th grade Language Arts Teacher	BA	Middle class, intact family. Renter, Fairfield County

## Codes

Initially coding produced over 20 possible categories. Upon closer scrutiny, it was decided that many of these could be sorted together, creating a more inclusive list of eight broader codes. Themes that were identified under the first five: family, motivation, socialization, future independence, friendship, and education plus were considered to be largely positive, while the last two: education minus and roadblocks were perceived as having a negative impact. A more definitive explanation of the themes follows:

**Table 4**

### *Coded Themes*

<b>Family</b>	Includes supports and interventions of parents, siblings, and extended family members
<b>Motivation</b>	Includes the subjects perceived ability to self advocate, developing awareness, affirmation, validation, and personal goals, which might lead to greater socialization and independence
<b>Socialization</b>	Includes participation in sports, community activities, work, social media, and other interests/hobbies
<b>Future Independence</b>	Includes planning for the future job training, and life goals
<b>Friendships</b>	Includes peer relationships, role models, other positive relationships
<b>Education plus</b>	Includes teachers, early interventions, job training, and support services, which led to positive outcomes
<b>Education negative</b>	Includes negative experiences with school districts, teachers, lack of training, supports or other perceived educational deficits
<b>Roadblocks</b>	Includes obstacles that were overcome, or are perceived to need to be overcome for a positive future outcome



In order to increase the validity of the data, the coded interviews were reviewed by this researcher and compared to the results attained by the other readers. The purpose was to determine whether statements noted by the readers were coded similarly. There was a strong correlation among the readers in identifying the same statements made by the interviewees. However, there were times when the readers did not agree on which code to assign to a particular statement. When this occurred, a consensus was obtained before attaching a specific code to each statement.

This researcher also had the advantage of having interviewed each subject and family members personally and had field notes to refer to. Therefore, there were other factors and personal notes that may not have been available in the transcripts. These were shared with the readers in order to understand some of the transcripts more precisely and reach a consensus.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1**

**What are some critical factors that may lead some students with disabilities to develop more socially appropriate skills that in turn contribute to socialization in the general community?**

As explained in Chapter 3, behavioral theorists, Uri Bronfenbrenner and Lev Vygotsky, believed that the relationships fostered between a child and the MKO [more knowledgeable other] were crucial in the overall development of a child's language, intellect, and social growth. The Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and the Ecological Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), explained in Chapter 2, were similarly

focused on the fact that the MKO must be able to scaffold the relationship to allow the child to move from support, to progressing, to mastery of the task (Gallagher, 1999). Initially this role falls to parents and family, and then must successfully be taken on by the educational system to move the child through the stages of development, and transition into adulthood.

In some of the families, the sibling was able to become the MKO for the subject in the educational environment. Those subjects who had siblings that were close in age, reaped the benefits of having role models, play mates, protectors, and also had a larger group of typical peers to interact within the subjects' mesosystem. In almost every case, the sibling was proactive in broadening the social sphere for the subject. These may be direct involvement or tangential support. Friends of the sibling often became friends of the subject, resulting in social interactions, which have continued well beyond the educational setting. The level of sensitivity and empathy that these siblings exhibited also helped to create a broader climate of acceptance and in some situations impacted the exosystem that the subject interacted within.

Becoming an independent adult requires that an individual become responsible for their own personal happiness, which would include being able to provide funds for their own dwelling, food, clothing, transportation, and intellectual and individual interests, and leisure time. For those individuals who are identified with special needs, the burden to reach that goal can be exponentially greater than for those who are deemed to be typical. The responsibility to assist that particular population in becoming independent requires a carefully constructed alliance of educational services, social services and family supports. Renzaglia, et al. (2003) noted that successful inclusion requires a change in

“...philosophy that urges schools, neighborhoods, and communities to welcome and value everyone, regardless of differences...and inclusion extends beyond the K – 12 school boundaries to people of all ages with disabilities. For inclusion to work, everyone within the target environments, including those with disabilities, must be equipped with the skills to be successful” (pp. 140-141).

The findings of this research indicate that while schools must, and do play a significant role in moving towards independence, these institutions very often fall short, and do not aggressively and productively prepare individuals with disabilities to becoming truly independent members of society at the highest level possible.

**P2** – “Something that M\_\_ [school system] had never done before that we really wanted them to do, was address the issue of social. They struggled with that because they just didn’t really get it.

**P3** – “He was very tired of school because they were always telling him to do the same thing over and over again and he got bored. He has more capacity to learn, to do more, but the school was always giving him the same paper, always the same worksheet, so that why he hated school.”

**S4** – “...one of the struggles with special education is right now, one of the reasons so much of it is bad, is because that [what we have in common] is not something taken into account. This person is just not a whole human. We gotta like give him special, rather than equality in treatment.”

**Sib 7** – “I’m not quite sure how much he really learned at school...his progress is mostly from everyone else helping him out I think.”

Throughout the interviews, a common thread was the certainty of the families, that without their advocacy and activism, the subjects would not have been able to develop into the socialized adult they have become. Family, be it parents, siblings, or extended family members provided the supports to nurture the subject socially. Acceptance and support on many levels, from those individuals, as well as the life lessons learned from them, were major contributions in the social development of all subjects.

**P1** – “The strategy of having siblings was very effective. Because he got that reinforcement all the way around in a more natural kind of situation...We’re a big

family also with cousins the same age. We're in a neighborhood where he grew up with kids the same age. Social exposure came from his peer group at school, or brothers, sisters, and family."

**P2** – "She [younger sister] would...jump on the back of P's power chair and reach over and drive like a bat out of hell. Senior night for soccer, she drove P's chair out on the field and was driving around at senior night with everybody there."

**S3** – "Sometimes I go with my cousins, when they have a party somewhere, or at their house."

**P3** – "He spends a lot of time with the family. He has an older brother, and they spend a lot of time together. They go out a lot, they go dancing, they do soccer."

**S4** – "J\_\_\_ [brother] is and was one of my very close friends...and was certainly a huge mentor of mine in high school."

**S6** – "I have a younger brother. His name is S\_\_\_...He's 2 years younger than me. We grew up very close together. We've only gotten closer as we've grown older...we definitely bounce each other up. I learn from him, he learns from me. It's a good dynamic between us."

**S7** – "Growing up, R\_\_\_ [older brother], always stuck up for me. All of his buddies were my buddies too."

Two of the themes, socialization and friendship, are fairly intertwined. For the purpose of this study, socialization was viewed as any positive interactions in school, work, or other social settings. Friendships were considered to reflect deeper relationships that are specific to individuals, and also are ones that last over a longer passage of time. It was noted that the subjects' positive response to social situations was generally indicative of their ability to develop independent friendships.

In many cases, it was the parents' efforts to ensure that their child was provided with appropriate social situations that nurtured the educational environment. In the case of Subject 2, both parents were employed in professions that provided them with unique skills in preparing their child to move along a social and educational continuum. There is no doubt that their strong sense of advocacy for their daughter also impacted the entire community they resided in. This began first within their immediate neighborhood and extended to the entire town.

These parents were emotionally and intellectually strong enough to allow their daughter to experience freedom and the challenges that come with that liberation. Long before she entered the public school system, they were engaging in meaningful and productive dialogues with the town. Their efforts helped shape and create an environment where children with disabilities were not only welcomed on playgrounds and in community areas, but where they also had full access to the amenities available in the town.

Those individuals who were more successful in developing friendships, were those whose parents were directly involved in creating that milieu. This cooperation generated "...positive attitudes, strong partnerships between parents and educators, and the use of appropriate interventions to address students' needs..." (Loiacono & Valenti, 2000, p.25).

**P2** – "Parents have a huge responsibility to not make districts 100% accountable for friendships with their kids, and that starts at a very young age. We had sleepovers, we were the ones who drove everywhere, we had the pool parties, we volunteered in the school...friendships are spending a lot of time with somebody doing things you both have in common...So, in order for her to develop longstanding friendships, she had to spend lots and lots and lots of time with kids."

**P5** – "I had to fight for him to be on the team. Freshman year, people said, well he is special ed. So I said, are you telling me that because he is special ed, he cannot play soccer. They said, we can't pay for an aide, I said he doesn't need an aide for sports, let him try. After fighting, he got on the team, and he is good."

**P6** – "I really think it was doing every sport, those Saturday outings that made a big difference and not sheltering him from that."

**Sib7** – "He went to his senior prom with a friend of ours. He was just the man. He had a great time. He had, you know, a hot blond date. I remember him being really happy and triumphant; kind of feeling like 'Alright, I'm a regular kid here', you know what I mean."

For the majority of the subjects, this focus and intervention by their family members undeniably fostered relationships that became deeper, lasting friendships. These individuals are now able to interact with peers of their choice independently. They have learned how to navigate the give and take of friendship at a deeper level. This allows them to share interests, sports, and to spend valued leisure time with other individuals who are also receiving social and emotional rewards from the friendship. For friendship to be lasting and significant, there must be a level of equality so that the give and take is balanced and not based on the needs of just one.

**S1** – “My partner for the triathlon is T\_\_\_\_, we have been friends since 2010.”

**S2** – “We have been friends for 8 years, but it seems like a lot longer. We are like sisters.”

**S5** – “My friends are O\_\_\_\_, S\_\_\_\_, and M\_\_\_\_. We met through sports.”

**S6** – “Age 12, was one of the best ages for me because I discovered rowing...that was where I made more friends because rowing gave me structure.”

**S7** – “I see my friend, A\_\_\_\_, at the Boat Club and we play darts.”

While friendships are extremely fulfilling, a lesser degree of socialization comes at a level associated with school and work situations. These are of a minor importance in regard to deep emotional fulfillment, but no less significant. An individual's ability to interact socially with others in various situations is an extremely important factor in being accepted by peers, both in friendly gatherings and in the work place. It can also be a basic factor in maintaining a positive climate at work and ultimately impact on the longevity of employment status.

The degree to which the subjects have taken initiative to engage with peers in the work place is indicative of their motivation to seek out social engagements. These may be of a more casual nature within the work environment, or carry over into socializing outside the workday. The climate of the work environment and attitude of supervisory staff also impacts this interaction. If a social situation at work is emotionally fulfilling, the subjects were more likely to feel validated as employees. However, neglecting the socialization aspects dramatically affects how a subject perceives his fellow employees, as noted by the comments of Subject 3.

**S1** – “What I like best about my job is to socialize with different people every day.”

**S7** – “People who work there [Stop ‘n Shop] are very friendly.”

**P7** – “I’ve been very pleased with them [work community at Stop ‘n Shop]; yeah, I think they’re really great. They made an effort because they like him, he’s a good kid.”

**S3** – “When it is time to eat lunch, I was always by myself, always by myself. Some people are pretty nice, but some people they were being mean too. A lot of people were being mean to me over there [Walmart].”

The transitional process of moving from high school to a post secondary and employment should be one that is productive and empowering for students with special needs. However, very often, this planning does afford these students the same opportunities as their typical peers. For Parent 1, this was never more evident than when her son stated in his transition PPT that he wanted to go to college. With that incentive and as an educator of special needs students, Parent 1 worked with the high school to develop a transitional educational setting that partnered with the Connecticut state college nearby. The exponentially significant impact provided both for social growth as well as

academic opportunities. The benefits reaped by Subject 1 have become the standard for all special needs students within that high school, as well as other school districts who can outpace students to attend that program.

Three of the subjects are not currently employed, but are/were engaged with peers in the educational forum at the secondary level. Their level of motivation reflects their experiences socially in the collegial environment, and could be compared to the positive reflections of the subjects who are actively employed.

**S2** – “After I graduated high school I was in the S\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ program at G\_\_\_ Community College. The first year is where students with disabilities learn personal skills and have work experience. Also, they are part of the college life.”

**S4** – “When you have a passion, or something or like enough, you just focus in. My life, with my ADD was like I was in a free fall, and then I started to go pick up a script and I finally had a direction. Theater kind of just like opened that up. And finally, it was all of these possibilities in my life. I was surrounded by hpeople a lot like me.”

**S6** – “I was at E\_\_\_\_\_ [College] Sports Network, and I edited videos for them. I was seen as a top performer and I became a supervisor at one point teaching kids how to edit videos, and also that taught me how to manage people, and create schedules, deadlines, be fair, take feedback, have an agenda, and hope they accomplish that agenda through team work.”

## **Research Question 2**

**How can the educational system, through inclusion, foster and create a richer environment for these skills to develop?**

While parents are essential in assisting their child to be more socially independent, the educational system also has a responsibility to provide strategies and situations that afford opportunities to engage with typical peers. While the concept of inclusion in education is often cited as a key component towards socialization, simply



placing a special needs student in that setting will not necessarily foster the needed level of sociability.

Technology has provided individuals with disabilities, a vast array of opportunities to interact with others, increase mobility, access previously restricted environments, and to use social media for both leisure and entertainment. For example, Subject 2, is able to utilize technology to be independent in her mobility, communication, and is able to both enter her home and remain alone with the knowledge that contact with family and others can be instantaneous if necessary.

Social media, however, can also be isolating. The use of smart phones has allowed us to withdraw from direct verbal and face-to-face interactions. Texting, solitary entertainment, gaming, and decreasing personal interactions can have a negative impact on the population in general. For students who must be taught how to navigate interactions with others, these modern aides can further isolate them from peers, as well as keeping typical peers from initiating direct contact with them. The educational community should be aware of this impact and provide additional direct interpersonal to counteract this factor. Use of appropriate social media should also be part of the curriculum at the transitional level for special needs students.

Each student must be challenged to move from a small group of family and friends, into a larger peer groups. This goal can be accomplished by providing as many supports as possible to reach a measure of success that can be maintained independently when those supports are withdrawn. There is no one course of action that should be considered to be applicable to all students. For the majority of subjects in this study, this was an area that was seen to be deficient in the educational setting.

**P1** – “I think schools could almost front load with character education for people of all abilities earlier than they do now. A lot of character education started in middle school but I feel like if they’d speak to that in elementary school that might raise awareness.”

**P2** – “So, you can learn how to do all of these different things in school, but if you don’t have anybody to spend time with and do things that you like with other people, then what’s the point.”

**P3** – “I feel like at N\_\_\_ High School, they didn’t teach him anything about how to get along with other kids.”

**P5** – “Because of his physical ability is like his typical peers, but he doesn’t engage himself with these kids. He feels competitive on the field, great, but he hasn’t connected with the team...not even in transportation. All of them drive, but nobody offers him like, ‘Oh I will give you a ride, I will take you home.’ The coach doesn’t understand his role is more than just sports. He is just there to win and only to win. But that is too bad, because it is an opportunity he is missing as an educator.”

**P7** – “...anytime he interacts with you know, normal kids like I think that’s always a success, you know makes it feel a little more comfortable.”

**Sib7** – “If he had more socialization with the mainstream kids, back when he was in high school, it would’ve helped a lot.”

While some parents reflected positively on their child’s educational supports, it is noticeable that the majority of those were parents who were extremely active in advocating for their child. In this study, these were also the parents who were most educated, and were also native English speaking. For these parents, there was always a clear vision of what they expected from the schools that helped drive the educational model. Their vision also helped the schools to be focused on future goals for these students.

**P1** – “When he was 15, he said he wanted to go to college. The school district recognized the need for change. That’s when I worked with them to set up the T\_\_\_ A\_\_\_ [transitional program] at Southern [CT state college].”

**P2** – “When she was in middle school, we were already telling the high school, you guys got to start thinking what high school is going to be for her, and she’s staying until she’s 21. We made that very clear...but you don’t have a transition program, you have nothing. They had a self-contained classroom with the ID [intellectually disabled] kids. We said, ‘That’s not going to work, that’s just not

appropriate.’ We made it very clear what our plans, our vision, our goal was for her, which was self sufficiency and independence.”

**P4** – Because of my involvement with \_\_\_\_\_ [parent organization founded by this mom for families with special needs children], they [school district] gave us whatever we wanted. There’s no question that it was because it was me. It was because they [district] didn’t really want to fight with me. They really wanted me to say good things. They wanted to work with [the organization] in a positive way and didn’t want me to be upset because I would be speaking to a larger number of people.”

**P6** – “...we were probably the only family that advocated that way for our kids and worked within the school system to make sure that he always had services, always had an aide. He was a success story because we took what the teachers said, what the aide said and we worked with it, and then we never left it just to the public school system.”

Three of the subjects attended schools in the same Connecticut school district, while the other 4 each attended schools in other Connecticut districts. Upon closer scrutiny, it cannot be ignored, that the parents, P3, P5, and P7 who expressed the most dissatisfaction all came from the same district. In each case, there is frustration that not enough was done, that their voices were not heard, and that the parents felt that there was little more they could do to advocate for their child. This particular subset of parents ranges from non-English speaking, to bilingual, to native speakers. Educationally they range from limited educational ability to college graduates. The social-economic range is also varied; ranging from a single mother with limited means to intact family groups considered to be middle class. Therefore, this researcher believes that the issues may reflect more upon the school district than other personal factors related to the families.

**P3** – “The school should have been able to teach him these things, like money. He still has problems with money. The clock, he can read, he can tell time, so that’s okay. But we had to teach him a lot of basic stuff at home. I wish that after they finish high school, there was something for them to train to do; find a trade like carpentry, or something.”

**P5** – “Sometimes they [teachers] don’t step up. He was taking a photography class, and they knew he had an IEP, but they didn’t keep their eye on him. He

was late with homework for 4 days because he didn't know what to do. No one seemed to ask, what is the problem, so that they could help him."

**P7** – "They [high school] placed him with an agency just before he graduated and they did absolutely nothing. I thought they were awful. I think with all the resources that they have in N\_\_\_\_, I think they could have done a lot better with you know...school to work things. I just thought it was so limited...they could have done something to include them a little bit more in, for them to interact with other kids, and you know to help them along and whatever they're going to do later in life."

In order to determine whether the results of the 3 subjects from the specific school district were due to a lack of preparation by the district or were based on other factors required that this researcher find answers to some follow up questions. Based on the information shared by Subject 1 and Subject 2, as well as family members, the school systems both attended did have a strong transitional program in place. The purpose of which, was to make the crossover from high school to the work force and/or community college. Additionally significant is that the parents of both Subjects 1 and 2 were in fact driving forces in creating those programs.

In the case of Subjects 4 and 6, these individuals were less impacted by their disability and transitioned directly into colleges that allowed them to apply their interests, and passions. It is also significant that they chose small, student focused educational institutions that supported them in attaining a degree in higher education. While it is yet unproven, it is expected that both these individuals will have a greater opportunity to socialize with peers and transition into a career that will allow them to become self sufficient adults.

In *Shifting Trends in Special Education*, Scull and Winkler (2011), noted that the state of Connecticut identified between 11% - 12.99% of its student population, as having

a recognized disability. Their findings also place Connecticut in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place nationwide, for special education expenditures. With this in mind, it would be expected that each school district would have a strong plan in place to provide for the transitional special education population to succeed both in post secondary education, and in the work force. Based on current data it could certainly be assumed that providing appropriate social skills would be a necessary component to a successful transition. Clark (2007), noted that “Transitions assessment is a process of obtaining, organizing, and using information to assist all individuals with disabilities of all ages and their families in making all critical transitions in those individuals’ lives both successful and satisfying.”

In 2009, the Connecticut Transition Task Force, revised their handbook under the direction of the Connecticut Department of Education, *Building a Bridge: From School to Adult Life*. This manual was specifically designed to provide both students with disabilities and their parents with checklists and strategies to make that transition focused and positive. The introduction states:

The following pages contain information that will help you play a meaningful role in guiding your child for the future. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), transition planning is required as part of your child’s IEP (Individualized Education Program). Transition planning begins no later than age 16 or earlier, if determined appropriate by the

Planning and Placement Team (PPT). Be proactive to insure goals for self advocacy, college, training, employment, and/or independent living are included in the IEP (p. 2).

Parents of Subjects 3, 5, and 7 were asked whether this manual or similar documents were ever provided to them when their child was 16 or at any time during the transitional process in high school. The same inquiry was also made of

the special education administrator from that high school who is tasked with supporting the students in their school to job placements.

Responses received were somewhat conflicting. The parents of those subjects stated that they did not receive that specific handbook, *Building a Bridge: From School to Adult Life*, and did not recall any specific written tool that was provided by the school district during their child's high school years. However, according to the administrator from the district, parents are provided with a set of guidelines, not specified, to assist them in the transitional process. An additional review of available Pupil Placement Team minutes indicated that students were administered assessments to ascertain their interests, intellectual capabilities, and applicable work force skills. However, no mention is noted in the minutes of providing specific documents to parents to guide them through the process.

The argument can certainly be made as to whether the role of the particular school system for Subjects 3, 4, and 5 may have been less robust than those of the other subjects. Bricker (2000) noted a variety of factors that determined the effectiveness of inclusion and suggested that at least three conditions need to be addressed to assure successful outcomes: (a) attitudes and beliefs, (b) professional knowledge and skills, and (c) adequate support systems ranging from professional development and collaboration to appropriate physical accommodations (Buysee, et. al., 2001). Further investigation would be needed, but the possibility of deficits in the latter two factors may be significant in the responses provided by those parents. Overall, the importance of these factors

cannot be stressed enough in the successful transition from inclusion at the educational level to inclusion as a lifestyle.

## Chapter 5

Pettigrew & Tropp (2006) concluded that contact alone is not enough, nor does it lead to the desired outcomes of positive peer interactions. The researchers indicated that system level support is required for inclusion to be successful (Kalymon, et. al. 2008). Friend (2006) noted that there needs to be a transition from adult support to peer support in order for inclusion to become a viable philosophy in education.

As a special educator since 1978, this researcher has watched the progressions of changes in educational law since beginning teaching. Since the first legislation, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act [PL 94-142] in 1975, opened the school doors to students with disabilities, special education has moved from segregated schools and isolated classes to full inclusion. Since then, the laws and regulations mandated from IDEA (1997) to No Child Left Behind (2002), and more recently, those put in place as a result of the implementation of Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010), have had widespread consequences for students identified with disabilities as well as those in the general education population.

While the academic issues have been focused on due to demands at both state and federal levels, this researcher was interested in investigating why some students were demonstrated greater facility in making the transition into more successful adults in the larger community. The researcher had questions regarding students' ability to develop appropriate socialization skills that could lead toward an inclusive lifestyle beyond the school doors. In reviewing current research, these questions have not been easily answered.



This research study was an attempt to look for factors that may facilitate the opportunity for students with disabilities to become socially successful in the community and work force once their public school education comes to a close. Insights will be shared with this researcher's school district to improve the transition process and in turn increase the likelihood that more students with special needs can enjoy a socially appropriate inclusive lifestyle as adults. Chapter 5 is divided into three sections: summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary**

While this study was limited to observations and data obtained from a very small sampling, the results did yield some insights that may provide possible answers to the two research questions that focus on developing socialization skills for students identified with special education needs and transitioning into adulthood to be socially functional in the community at large.

The first research question was focused on identifying critical factors that might indicate why some students were more successful in that transition to adulthood. The subjects had various disabilities that ranged from intellectually disabled to specific learning disability, and also included one subject with a significant physical impairments resulting from cerebral palsy without intellectual impairment. The disability factor did not seem to significantly impact an individual's ability to develop socially appropriate behaviors. The two subjects with the disabilities of cerebral palsy and Down syndrome were extremely successful in developing strong, life long friendships, and were engaged

in a variety of social events that spanned the work place and community college, as well as personal interests and leisure activities.

It was important that themes coded as roadblocks are considered to determine whether these factors significantly impacted the subjects' ability to be successful in these social interactions or were typical of adolescent or young adult might routinely experience. While several issues were coded as roadblocks, the mention of social isolation at various levels was noted. Two of the subjects mentioned this at the high school level when they struggled to develop at a similar rate as their typical peers. At the adult level, parents of three subjects stated that while their child did have some social activities with organizations and family, a similar peer group that would nurture friendships was wanting. These parents who were concerned for the future of their child when they might no longer be around to foster social interactions.

Social media greatly increased the subjects' opportunities to interact with peers. While this can be a positive aspect, the negative possibilities must also be addressed. One parent mentioned the fear that her son would be taken advantage of because he was too trusting. Another parent spoke about her challenges in teaching her son how to manage his social media responsibly, and was worried about the inappropriate content. Both parents expressed the need to balance their child's independence with social media with their need to monitor their exposure. As technology changes at such a rapid pace, this will continue to be an issue. The use of social media has limited the face-to-face social interaction. The isolating element in the use of smart phones, tablets, and other technology is not conducive to the development of strong social skills necessary for

direct and personal contact among individuals. The implications of this can be catastrophic for individuals who already struggle with direct peer interactions.

The subject with cerebral palsy might be considered to have the most significant roadblock due to her inability to be mobile or communicate without technology. Although significant, these obstacles do not define her as a person, but can be challenging. That subject was often annoyed at people who spoke to her parents or aide first, and ignore her. She is a strong self advocate however, and makes sure that she speaks up through her communication system. She is also aware that she must advocate for her rights as an individual with a physical disability. The subject has learned how to direct people to assist her if her power chair fails, and how to take advantage of assistance available to her in regards to public transportation and access to her community. These self-advocacy skills were priorities her parents had focused on from an early age. These have been major achievements for this individual, and are essential life skills for her to be an independent adult.

Education was coded as both positive and negative. There was a notable correlation in positive educational experiences and strong parental support. Parents of subjects who become involved as advocates for their child early on, reported that their ability to work with the educational system was satisfying. This included four parents from different public school systems in Connecticut. Two of the subjects had very similar experiences in the Birth to 3 programs, where language development was the major focus. Based upon initial evaluations, both subjects were first considered to be on the Autism Disorder Spectrum, but were subsequently identified with a specific learning disability in elementary school once their language skills developed. The other two

subjects where outliers as their disabilities were other health impaired (cerebral palsy) and intellectually disabled (Down syndrome).

Three of the parents who reported positive outcomes and positive working relationships with their schools were also involved at the professional and community level. One parent is a special education professional, another is employed by the state of Connecticut as a behavior modification expert in the Department of Developmental Services, while the third is an attorney who created a countywide support group for parents of children with special needs. All three had a clear vision of their children's needs, strengths, knew what they expected from the school, and had a focus on desired outcomes for the children's futures. The fourth parent, while not as dynamically engaged community wide, did become active in her child's school through the PTA, volunteering, and advocating for her son's direct supports [one to one paraprofessional, and tutoring] from elementary through high school.

As stated in Chapter 4, the responses from parents and subjects that indicated the most dissatisfaction with their education experience came from families in the same school district. These three subjects and their parents noted that inclusion was somewhat limited, especially at the high school level. The subjects had reduced opportunities to socially interact with typical peers within the school day. Parental commitment and action was necessary for two of the students who did become involved in activities such as sports and band.

One parent spoke about her fight to allow her son to simply try out for the soccer team. The school had indicated that they could not provide for a paraprofessional for sports. They failed to see that the student did not require the same supports for athletic

programs as he did for academics. Once given the opportunity, the student made the freshman soccer team on his own merits and was able to play for both junior varsity and varsity. That subject noted that the best day of his life was being able to be part of a winning team, and celebrate on the field with his teammates. As a follow up, the parent did note that while her son feels that he is part of the team, there is no carry over to socialization once practices and games conclude. The subject, who is on the Autism spectrum, does not express any awareness of being left out, but the parent stated that she believes the coach is missing an opportunity, to promote a broader sense of inclusion.

The other subject became involved with the very successful high school band program in his district. This was as a direct result of his older brother's participation in that band, and also due to the fact, that his parents were active band supporters. While the subject did not play in the band, he was welcomed into a group referred to as "ninja", whose jobs included loading/unloading trucks and setting up for the band. This particular group of students was welcoming and allowed the subject to continue to be part of the band community even after his brother had graduated.

The role of the sibling should not be discounted when identifying positive factors in socialization. For the subject who participated in the band, the social acceptance he gained through his older brother was significant. During the high school years, it provided him with a group of protectors, who always "had his back" if there was a sign of bullying or other negative peer interactions. Friends of his brother also provided the opportunity for the subject to have a prom date and be included in more typical peer activities. One close friend has continued that relationship for more than ten years, and

there is a standing date for a night at a local club to socialize and compete in a dart competition.

In four other subjects' interviews, the role of the sibling was also stated to be a factor that contributed to increasing socialization. For one subject, riding the school bus with his sister, provided him the opportunity to interact with typical peers, as well as given him a "protector" when and if he encountered a potential bullying situation.

Two siblings referred to their brothers as their best friend. These siblings were close in age to the subjects and in the case of an older brother, the subject considered him a mentor and role model. The other subject's younger brother acted as a sounding board for his sibling who noted that they learned from each other.

The younger sister of one subject took an even more active role and became president of her high school's chapter for Best Buddies Inc. This program pairs student volunteers with special needs students, with the purpose of providing them with a friend or mentor. She worked to promote the program among her friends and teammates. Under her direction, the program became focused on activities outside of school as well as during the school day.

Themes of motivation, socialization and friendship were often directly linked to the interventions of family members. Their efforts ensured that the subjects' involvement with typical peers took place outside of school as well as inside. Generally, these parents did not leave the job of creating social interactions for their children solely up to the school. They had a broader sense of what their responsibilities were for ensuring that numerous social activities ranging from: play dates, sleepovers, time at the playground, car pooling, sports, and other leisure activities were actively fostered and supported.

Parent 2 stated that parents of children with special needs must ask themselves, “What are you doing to develop friendships for your kids? It’s not the school’s responsibility.”

## **Conclusion**

It was evident that the information from the interviews indicated that the role of the parent was the single most important factor in determining whether a child with disabilities is able to bridge the social transition from school to the community at large. There is inadequate support available in the educational setting to impart the necessary skills that will allow special needs student to move from the structured, and often-unrealistic social situations in a school, to the independent social skills that are needed for an adult to have an emotionally fulfilling existence. While schools may engage in an inclusive model, and promote programs such as Best Buddies Inc., without parental support from an early age, socialization skills will not develop to the individual’s greatest potential.

Parents whose children became more socially successful also had high expectations. These parents were strong advocates for their children, but have also done their best to empower the subjects to become self-advocates. They are keenly aware of their mortality and that their adult children will need to survive without them in the future. These parents have made connections in the community, churches, and with federally and state funded programs to ensure that there will be jobs, programs and living situations that nurture a lifestyle that allows as much independence as possible.

They also recognize the limits that their child’s disability may present. They are realistic in their approach, but keep their expectations high. Parent 1 stated it well, “You

can do no harm with high expectations, you can do harm with low expectations.” Having high expectations require that you impose the same expectations for your child with disabilities as you would for your typical child. It is not a question of whether or not their child will do all the things that a typical child does. The question is, what provisions are necessary to be put in place in order for to make it happen.

If the role of parents is the single most important factor, then what role must schools have? The subjects of this study ranged in age from 18 to 29 years of age. For the majority of them (6 out of 7), the educational reform measure, No Child Left Behind [NCLB] was first put into place during their high school years (2002). The goal of this educational mandate was laudable, however, the implications for students with disabilities were complex.

There are opposing points of view on whether the NCLB and IDEA mandates were mutually beneficial to students with disabilities, or were working against each other. Certainly providing students with disabilities with the same opportunities to curriculum and assessments should have provided for increased opportunities to the same academic programs as students in the general population. However, the punitive measures that were to be implemented for schools that did not make adequate yearly progress [AYP] would certainly have given school districts a reason for concern. How would the testing results of students in special education impact school performance and reflect upon their report?

This study does not have those answers, but reflecting on how school districts may or may not have provided the same level of curriculum for the students with disabilities is a factor that merits further study. According to the Annual Report to



Congress on Implementation of IDEA (2004) the following data on inclusion was reported:

- 48% of students were in a general ed. setting more than 80% of the day
- 23% of students were in a general ed. setting more than 60% of the day
- 29% of students were in a general ed. setting more than 40% of the day

In looking back at the information shared by the subjects and their parents, only three of the subjects (S2, S4, S6) were receiving their education with their typical peers for 80% of the day. Subjects 1 and 5 were in the general education setting for 60% of the day, while Subjects 3 and 7 spent only 40% of the day with their peers in a general education setting. Did school districts place less emphasis on social skills, which are essential in generating an more empathetic student body? Focusing on test taking strategies and academic subjects became a priority, which may have impacted the subjects' daily opportunities to interact with typical peers.

What responsibility do school districts have to provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to develop similar social skills as their typical peers? If a parent is not focused on the future of their child, or does not have the prerequisite skills to navigate the system, how much responsibility must the school district assume?

In looking at the interviews with the 3 subjects and parents who expressed the least amount of satisfaction with the transitional process in their mutual high school, there were some points to be considered.

The state of Connecticut mandates that the transition process begin prior to the age of 15. Parents must have productive conversations with the school as early as possible so that all parties involved have clear and focused goals for the students. If parents are not able to initiate that, the school district should have a process in place to

facilitate this, and provide the parent with a toolbox to ensure that the schools, parents, and students know what needs to be accomplished to reach the desired outcome.

The four subjects from other school districts were engaged in a more focused conversation at an early age and the transitional process at the high school level held no surprises, but was simply a continuation of the dialogues begun in the elementary years. These parents also noted that they were provided with some type of manual or checklist such as “Building a Bridge: From School to Adult Life”, which is provided by the Connecticut Department of Education.

The district administrator, who was contacted for the 3 subjects who attended the same high school, did state that he believed this manual was also provided to parents, but could not definitely state that it was. Follow up with two of the three parents indicated that they could not remember receiving that manual or a similar document. The three parents from this high school all stated consistently, that they believed the district did not have a long-range focus on where their child needed to be by the time they reached high school. For these parents, the transition PPT at age 15 was the beginning of the conversation, and it came too late to be effective in providing a viable path to adulthood. These three parents believe that their school district could have done more.

One factor affecting socialization that was apparent during the interviews with the four subjects, who have reached the highest level of socialization, was the continuing of their education at the post secondary level. While two subjects went on to 4-year colleges, the other two moved into transitional programs at community college and at a state college. These programs were created to partner with school districts in bridging the high school to work/academic gap. Both programs provided the educational

component that enabled the subject to determine whether their future path might include college. Another critical component was the ability of these two subjects to be engaged in social activities that were appropriate for their age and with typical peers. For one subject, the ability to use the recreational facilities was key, while the other used the opportunity to attend leisure activities such as trips to theaters with other students.

The school district that provided the least level of satisfaction does not currently have any partnership with the local community college, although it is in the same city. This would appear to be an interaction that should be actively pursued. At this time, the special education department in that district has met with the administration at that community college. However, there are no definitive plans or programs in place for the immediate future.

To conclude; the results of this study indicate that the role of parents is the single most important factor in the successful socialization of a student with special needs. While the role of the school district is no less important, it does not seem that enough will be done if parents do not take an active role early on, and throughout their child's education. It is imperative that parents and school districts not be solely focused on academics, as that alone will not result in a well-balanced social life as a student with special needs transitions into the work force, and develops a healthy social life with peers. School districts must see their students, both typical and those with special needs, more wholly, and focus on nurturing social interactions among all students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

When this researcher originally envisioned this study, it encompassed a much broader group of individuals that included students; typical and those with special needs, parents, and educators. The ideal research would have followed an ethological model to gather data on students moving from elementary school, through the transition process, and onto adulthood. With the limited time and funds available to this researcher, neither option was feasible.

However, future studies that encompass these aspects would be extremely productive in determining whether the conclusions reached by this researcher can be applied to a larger sampling. Similar studies that focus directly on the one high school that produced the least satisfied subjects and parents would also be necessary before these results could be considered to be applicable to a larger population.

The school district mentioned above, also has two other secondary schools; one consists of both a typical high school program and also an embedded magnet school, while the other program is in an alternative high school. Further research at these programs would verify whether the concerns expressed in the interviews were district wide or associated only with the high school referenced in the study.

Another line of research that would be productive in increasing the validity of these findings would be one that focuses on the connection/partnerships that may exist in the state of Connecticut between high schools and local post-secondary institutions, both state and private. This focus would provide additional data to determine whether those programs increase the socialization of students with special needs as they move toward adulthood and independence.

This was a qualitative study and focused on the personally reflections of a small, purposeful sample of students with special needs and their parents and family members. Future research that uses objective measures would be productive in linking the outcomes of this research to a larger sample of subjects and school districts in analyzing social integration.

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## **Appendix A**

SPED\*NET Wilton Email

**From:** SPED\*NET Wilton <[info@spednetwilton.org](mailto:info@spednetwilton.org)>  
**Date:** May 30, 2014, 2:30:52 PM EDT  
**To:** [eviesuekessler@yahoo.com](mailto:eviesuekessler@yahoo.com)  
**Subject:** Grad Student interviewing former students about "inclusive education"  
**Reply-To:** [info@spednetwilton.org](mailto:info@spednetwilton.org)

**WHO?** Individuals who were identified as having special needs and who were educated in a predominately inclusive public school setting.

**WHAT?** Interview with Doctoral Student concerning your development of social skills, peer relations, friendships, and community involvement.

**HERE ARE THE DETAILS:**

Doctoral student is seeking individuals who were identified as having special needs and who were educated in a predominately inclusive public school setting. The topic relates to the development of social skills, peer relations, friendships, and community involvement. Individuals must be 21+ and be able to speak directly with interviewer or via a translator. Family member(s) should also be willing to participate in a separate interview. Participants should be able to devote one to two sessions of approximately 40 - 60 minutes per session.

The doctoral student will travel to a mutually agreeable site and will be available to meet informally prior to the interviews with the individual and family members.

**Please contact Rosanne Fullam with any responses or questions at:**  
[rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu)

**Thank you very much!**

## **Appendix B**

### Signed Consent Forms for Interviews

**Title of research study:** A Case Study of Social Strategies: A Retrospective from 7 Adults Educated in an Inclusive Setting within the CT Public Schools

**Investigator:** Rosanne Guccione Fullam

We invite you to take part in a research study because you received an education within an inclusive public school setting and at the time were eligible to receive special education services.

### ***What you should know about a research study***

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- You volunteer to be in a research study.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

### ***Who can I talk to?***

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at **(203) 856-8717**

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to the IRB Administrator at (203) 576-4973 or [irb@bridgeport.edu](mailto:irb@bridgeport.edu) for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

### ***Why are you doing this research?***

***There is no clear and decisive research concerning best practices for supporting students with special needs in developing strong peer relations at the middle and high school levels. The goal of this research is to have dialogues with adults like you who have been educated in an inclusive classroom. It is hoped that gathering feedback on your experience will help guide the future practices of educators.***

### ***How long will the research last?***

We expect that you will be in this research study for 6 – 8 months.

### ***How many people will be studied?***

We expect about 6 – 10 people here will be in this research study. We expect that you will be in this research study for 2 – 4 months.

***What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?***

- *You will be given a set of interview questions to look over prior to our meeting.*
- *The first meeting will be an informal one lasting no longer than 30 – 50 minutes at a mutually agreed upon location. It will be considered as an ice breaker where we can begin to get acquainted and feel comfortable with each other.*
- *The following meetings will be conducted as interviews and allow you to answer the questions you had received earlier. There will also be the opportunity for you to provide additional information that may not be included in the questions but that you believe is relevant to the topic.*
- *There may be follow up questions that emerge from our discussions that will not be included in the original format.*
- *All interviews will be recorded.*
- *A written transcript of the interviews will be provided to you so that you can check for accuracy.*
- *You may withdraw from this research study at any time.*

***What happens if I say no, I do not want to be in this research?***

You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

***What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?***

You agree to take part in the research now. You may stop at any time and it will not be held against you.

**Signature Block for Capable Adult: Long Form**

Your signature below documents your permission to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of your protected health information:

_____ Signature of subject	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of subject	
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
<b>Rosanne G. Fullam</b>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 25px; width: 100%;"></div>
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent	Form Date

- **Interviews will be recorded and transcribed.**
- **Transcriptions will be made available to subjects upon request.**



## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

---

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Sean Bogart  
Printed Name of Subject

Sean Bogart  
Signature of Subject

8/13/014  
Date

Rosanne Fullam  
Signature of Witness

8/13/14  
Date

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DATE OF IRB APPROVAL 12/19/13

Initial \_\_\_\_\_ Page 3 of 3

IRB NUMBER: 2013-12-03

## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

---

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Michelle Bogart

Printed Name of Subject

Michelle Bogart

Signature of Subject

8/13/2014

Date

Deem Bogart

Signature of Witness

8/13/2014

Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

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IRB NUMBER:

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Paige M. Libranelli  
Printed Name of Subject

Paige Libranelli  
Signature of Subject

7/22/14  
Date

C. L. L.  
Signature of Witness

7/22/14  
Date

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## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

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Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Sandra Librandi  
Printed Name of Subject

[Signature]  
Signature of Subject

7/30/14  
Date

Paijo Librandi  
Signature of Witness

7/30/14  
Date

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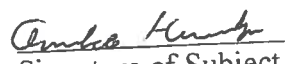
## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717


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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Oswaldo Hernandez  
Printed Name of Subject

  
Signature of Subject

8/14/14  
Date

  
Signature of Witness

8/14/14  
Date

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## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

PRISCILLA BARRANTES  
Printed Name of Subject

  
Signature of Subject

8/14/14  
Date

  
Signature of Witness

8/14/14  
Date

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DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

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If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Jacob Presson

Printed Name of Subject

Jacob Presson

Signature of Subject

8/23/14

Date

[Signature]

Signature of Witness

8/23/14

Date

## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

EVE KESSLER  
Printed Name of Subject

[Signature]  
Signature of Subject

3/24/15  
Date

[Signature]  
Signature of Witness

3/24/15  
Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/17

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Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Sebastian Coto

Printed Name of Subject

Sebastian Coto

Signature of Subject

8/14/14

Date

Sebastian Coto

Signature of Witness

8/14/14

Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

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Page 3 of 3

IRB NUMBER:

2013-12-03

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Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

---

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

NAZIRA CCTO

Printed Name of Subject

[Signature]

Signature of Subject

8/14/14

Date

[Signature]

Signature of Witness

8/14/14

Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

IRB NUMBER:

2013-12-03

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Page 3 of 3

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If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

---

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

James Ferguson Finn

Printed Name of Subject

J.F.F.

Signature of Subject

07/23/14

Date

J.Fi.

Signature of Witness

7/23/14

Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 3 of 3

IRB NUMBER:

2013-12-03

## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Rosanne Fullam.  
Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

IRENE LYNN CUNANAN

Printed Name of Subject

Irene Cunanan

Signature of Subject

25 July 2019

Date

R. F. F.

Signature of Witness

25 July 2019

Date

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Contact information: [rfullam@bridgeport.edu](mailto:rfullam@bridgeport.edu) (203) 856-8717

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Matthew Perry  
Printed Name of Subject

Matthew Perry  
Signature of Subject

2-15-15  
Date

[Signature]  
Signature of Witness

11 Feb 15  
Date

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DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

IRB NUMBER:

2013-12-03

Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 3 of 3

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

MARY LAMERY-PERRY  
Printed Name of Subject

Mary Perry  
Signature of Subject

2/11/15  
Date

[Signature]  
Signature of Witness

11 Feb 15  
Date

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DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12.19.13

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Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 3 of 3

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

DUNCAN W. PERRY  
Printed Name of Subject

[Signature]  
Signature of Subject

11 FEB 15  
Date

M. LAY RAY  
Signature of Witness

2/11/15  
Date

DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

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Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 3 of 3

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---

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Ryan Perry  
Printed Name of Subject

[Signature]  
Signature of Subject

3/4/15  
Date

Catherine Modugno  
Signature of Witness

3/4/15  
Date

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DATE OF IRB APPROVAL

12/19/13

Initial \_\_\_\_\_

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IRB NUMBER:

2013-12-03



## **Appendix C**

### **Semi- Structured Interview Questions**

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Subjects**

1. Do you have a job? (describe your job, tell me what you like best/least, do you work alone/with others, do you like your co-workers, how do they make you feel, do you do anything with them outside of work, where do you eat lunch and with whom, how do you get to work)
2. Can you tell me about your experiences in middle school? (classroom experiences with teachers and peers, lunch room, recess, any school sports/clubs/activities, good memories, negative memories, special teachers/friends, favorite subject –why, transportation)
3. What do you remember about high school? (classroom experiences with teachers and peers, lunch room, recess, any school sports/clubs/activities, good memories, negative memories, special teachers/friends, favorite subject –why, transportation, job training, participating in the IEP process, privileges/freedoms, parent involvement)
4. Are you now or have you been part of any church or community activities?
5. Have you or do you now play any sports? (teams, clubs, just for fun)
6. Have you or do you now play any musical instruments? (formal or informal bands, lessons, for fun)
7. Tell me about your family. (role of siblings, control of parents, family activities, extended family interactions, living situation)
8. Who are your friends? Are there 1 or 2 you consider best friends? (why are they considered friends, character traits, shared interests/activities, where do you see them, how long have they been friends)
9. When you think back to school is there a time that you can remember when you felt really good about doing something with friends?
10. Can you remember any bad experiences when you felt bullied or just left out?
11. If you were a teacher, what would you do to make students get along better?
12. How would you help a younger student who was similar to you have a good experience making friends at school?

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Family Members**

1. Please describe your child/sibling in order to give a fuller perspective on who they are?  
(character traits, talents, shortcomings)
2. Can you remember a really great moment that shared with you or observed from his/her school experiences?
3. Was there a time when he/she came home and told you about a problem or bad day with peers?
4. What strategies/activities do you think worked best to help him/her learn how to socialize with peers?
5. Were these learned/taught at school? If not, where?
6. What do you see as the greatest success your child/sibling has had so far in becoming a more social person?
7. What could the schools have done differently or improved upon to contribute towards helping to develop better/greater peer relations for your child/sibling?
8. How, if any at all, did the schools fail in this regard?
9. How would you define “inclusion” as it pertains to education? Do you think the schools see it the same way?

## **Appendix D**

Packet Provided to Readers

### **Description of Subjects:**

**S.B.** – 29 year old male with Downs Syndrome. Educated in Connecticut public schools in both general education settings and special education classes. He has an intact family with 2 siblings (1 younger, 1 older), and no physical limitations (has run a triathlon). Currently employed part time and lives at home.

**P.L.** – 24 year old female with cerebral palsy. Educated in Connecticut public schools; full inclusion with paraprofessional support. Currently enrolled full time in local community college, and has hired her own companion to assist her. Utilizes motorize wheel chair and ipad for communication (text to speech). She has an intact family, 2 siblings (1 younger, 1 older), and lives at home. She pays for aide, transportation as needed (CT transport for disabled), and also pays her parents a small stipend using SSI funds. Has created a budget to assist her in monitoring her finances.

**O.H.** – 29 year old bilingual male. Identified by Connecticut public schools with PDD (persuasive developmental disorder), no physical limitations. Educated primarily in CT public schools with minimal inclusion in the general educational setting. Out placement for grades 6 - 8 at Foundations School (focus on special needs students with language, developmental disorders, and social needs). Currently lives at home with mother (Spanish speaking only) and older brother. Not currently employed, drives his own car.

**J.P.** – 22 year old male, originally identified as being on the Autism Spectrum by Birth to 3 program. Label changed to Learning Disabled with Attention Deficit Disorder. Educated primarily in Connecticut public schools; full inclusion in general education with one/one paraprofessional support (Pre K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade), and other interventions (OT, Speech). Outplaced for middle school at Eagle Hill (low teacher/student ratio, focus on socialization and language). Currently senior with a Fine Arts/Theater major at Marymount Manhattan College, expected to graduate May '15. Resides in apartment near college with roommates; intact family, 1 older sibling.

**S.C.** – 19 year old bilingual male, originally identified with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, label changed to Autism in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Educated in Connecticut public schools since preschool with full inclusion up until 8<sup>th</sup> grade with some paraprofessional support. Currently a senior in high school with classes in both general educational setting and special education classes. He has an intact family (English spoken at home) and lives at home with 1 older sibling.

**J.F.** – 24 year old male, identified with a Specific Learning Disability (language based); but did not meet criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder; however family did not agree with that recommendation and LD label was kept. Educated in Connecticut public schools; full inclusion in general educational setting with some resource support through high school. Graduated from Emerson College in Boston with a degree in communications. Currently seeking employment in journalism field but does some free lance writing for local community newspaper. Intact family with 1 younger sibling, resides at home.

**M.P.** – 29 year old male identified on the Autism Spectrum. Educated in Connecticut public schools with limited inclusion in the general education setting. Currently employed and drives himself to work. He has an intact family and resides at home. Has one older sibling who no longer lives in the house, but is still involved with M.P. socially.

### **Protocols to Train Readers for Coding Interviews**

All readers currently hold a doctoral degree or are enrolled in a doctoral program. Each reader agreed to voluntarily participate in compiling data and completed the same training to increase validity of the data.

These included:

1. Viewing a YouTube video, “Qualitative analysis of interview data: A step-by-step guide” by Kent Löfgren, a research professor at Umeå University, Sweden.
2. Having the researcher provide and explain the codes that will be used for the data.
3. Coding the same sample interview using those codes identified by the researcher.
4. Signing a consent agreement to allow their analysis to be used in this researcher’s study.

This is to verify that I \_\_\_\_\_ have viewed the above-mentioned video, and that the codes identified for this research have been fully explained to me. I agree to read and code the interviews I have been provided impartially according to the guidelines set by the researcher. I am not receiving any monetary compensation, but am participating solely for the purpose of assisting in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(University attended or attending)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Degree conferred, date or expected date)

### Identified Codes for the Study\*\*

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- 1) **Family** – includes supports and interventions of parents, siblings, and extended family
  - 2) **Motivation** – includes self advocacy, awareness, affirmation, validation, and personal goals
  - 3) **Socialization** – includes sports, community activities, work, social media, and other interests/hobbies
  - 4) **Future Independence** – includes planning, job training, life goals
  - 5) **Friendships** – includes peer relations, role models, other relationships
  - 6) **Education** (positive) – includes teachers, early interventions, job training, support services
  - 7) **Education** (negative) – includes teachers, lack of training, supports or other educational deficits identified
  - 8) **Roadblocks** – obstacles that were overcome, or to be overcome in the future
- 

*\*\*Note that:*

- 
- *Codes 1 – 6 are considered positive themes, while 7 and 8 would be considered to negatively impact the subject.*
  - *It is possible for a marked passage to show evidence of more than one code.*
-

### Protocols to Train Readers for Coding Interviews

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This is to verify that I Patrick Muhliff Ph.D. have viewed the above-mentioned video, and that the codes identified for this research have been fully explained to me. I agree to read and code the interviews I have been provided impartially according to the guidelines set by the researcher. I am not receiving any monetary compensation, but am participating solely for the purpose of assisting in this research.

Patrick Muhliff  
(Signature)

4-25-15  
(Date)

Teachers College, Columbia  
(University attended or attending)

University

Ph.D. 2006  
(Degree conferred, date or expected date)

↳ Stud Psychology



### Protocols to Train Readers for Coding Interviews

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- 3) Coding the same sample interview using those codes identified by the researcher.
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This is to verify that I Laura Gunnin have viewed the above-mentioned video, and that the codes identified for this research have been fully explained to me. I agree to read and code the interviews I have been provided impartially according to the guidelines set by the researcher. I am not receiving any monetary compensation, but am participating solely for the purpose of assisting in this research.

Laura Gunnin  
(Signature)

4/3/15  
(Date)

Northcentral University  
(University attended or attending)

Doctorate 2016  
(Degree conferred, date or expected date)

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- 1) Viewing a YouTube video, "Qualitative analysis of interview data: A step-by-step guide" by Kent Löfgren, a research professor at Umeå University, Sweden.
- 2) Having the researcher provide and explain the codes that will be used for the data.
- 3) Coding the same sample interview using those codes identified by the researcher.
- 4) Signing a consent agreement to allow their analysis to be used in this researcher's study.

This is to verify that I Kathleen Shea have viewed the above-mentioned video, and that the codes identified for this research have been fully explained to me. I agree to read and code the interviews I have been provided impartially according to the guidelines set by the researcher. I am not receiving any monetary compensation, but am participating solely for the purpose of assisting in this research.

Kathleen Shea 4/10/15  
 (Signature) (Date)

University of Bridgeport Ed.D. 5/14  
 (University attended or attending) (Degree conferred, date or expected date)